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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Assad Interview,
Syria/Finland, Syria/Iran, Lebanon/Israel/US (8/24)

¶1. Summary: President Asad's interview with Dubai TV was the major topic in papers today. President Asad said he would view deployment of international troops along the Lebanon-Syria border as a hostile move toward his country. "It robs Lebanon of its sovereignty. No single state in the entire world would tolerate deploying foreign troops on its border posts unless there is a state of war with the other state, as is the case in the Golan or in southern Lebanon. This is normal. It is, first, handing over sovereignty to other parties; and, secondly, it signals a hostile stand against Syria. Naturally, it will create problems between Syria and Lebanon," Asad said.

Asked whether he will call upon the Lebanese government to refuse the deployment of international forces along the borders with Syria, President Asad said, "We call on the Lebanese government to shoulder its responsibilities just like any other state. It will be held responsible. If it wants to ruin the relationship between Syria and Lebanon, then it is free to do so. It can bear the responsibility for that. There is a trend in the Lebanese Government and a trend among the majority of the Lebanese seeking to accomplish this objective."

On the issue of the Shebaa Farms, Asad said, "There can be no drawing of (borders) at the Shebaa Farms before the departure of Israeli forces," and that the issue "will only be solved in a comprehensive solution that includes the Golan."

On the contradiction in Syrian statements regarding the Shebaa Farms, President Asad said that "there is no contradiction; on the contrary, each position completes the other. In my last speech, I said that Shebaa Farms is Lebanese territory, but what are the borders of Shebaa Farms? Is there no demarcation? How is demarcation done? They now propose to conduct demarcation on the map in order to serve Israel. This falls within that same context. It is a fact. Some international forces pressured Syria in the past to implement this. Demarcation between two states cannot be conducted on a map. The map reflects the situation on the ground and not vice versa. Demarcation is done on the ground through certain coordinates; there is a technical aspect to it. You first determine these coordinates, then you put them on the map, and then you register the final agreement on

these coordinates with the United Nations."

Syrian papers also reported the visit to Finland by Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem, who held official talks with his Finnish counterpart Erkki Tuomioja on the situation in the region, particularly in Lebanon and Palestine. Both sides reviewed repercussions of the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, particularly after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, and the role of the UNIFIL troops in South Lebanon. They reiterated the importance of an Israeli withdrawal to behind the blue line, consolidating the cease-fire, returning the displaced back home, and rebuilding Lebanon. The two sides discussed Syrian-European relations and the importance of involving Europe, the closest neighbor to the region, in solving the problems it faces, foremost of which is the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In this context, viewpoints were identical on the significance of boosting dialogue between the two sides after developments have proven the pivotal role Syria plays in the regional arena in the service of peace and security in the region.

Papers also reported that Syrian Grand Mufti Ahmad Bader al-Din Hasoun, in a discussion after reading the communique of the 19th International Conference of Islamic Unity in Tehran, stressed the legitimacy of resistance as long as there are occupied Arab territories, emphasizing the necessity of restoring the occupied Arab territories in Lebanon, Palestine, and Syrian Golan. Sheikh Hasoun called on the Conference to include the legitimacy of resisting occupation in its final statement.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"A vision about what happened and what will happen. President Asad, in an interview with Dubai satellite channel: Syria has always been in the hurricane's eye.... Those who have protected

her are the Syrian people.... Coming weeks will determine the final vision of peace.... Everyone who thinks of isolating Syria will isolate himself from the basic issues.... We are highly sensitive towards foreign interventions.... Deploying UNIFIL on the Syrian-Lebanese border will create a state of enmity between the two countries.... If peace does not lead to the restoration of the Golan, a Syrian resistance will emerge, whether we like it or not" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/24)

"FM Mouallem in Helsinki holding talks with Foreign Minister of Finland on the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon and Syrian-European relations" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/24)

"British MP George Galloway: The victory of Lebanese Resistance impressed British public opinion" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/24)

"Israel escalates its violations of UNSC Resolution 1701. Germany responds to Washington: There is no need for a second resolution. Amnesty International: Israel committed war crimes; we call for an independent investigation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/24)

"Israel purchases two nuclear submarines from Germany" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/24)

"The Lebanese Resistance thanks Syria for its support and the great hospitality it offered displaced Lebanese" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/24)

"Republicans cast doubts on Bush's capabilities: Is he stupid? ... Will the Vietnam defeat be repeated in Iraq?" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/24)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"War on Peace?"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (8/24): "The aggressive war that Israel launched against Lebanon had a grave impact on the Israeli military and political establishments, which witnessed splits, differences, and mutual recriminations. Moreover, contradictory and largely conflicting statements and positions appeared: Some talked about peaceful negotiations with Syria and others rejected such negotiations. Yet others spoke about a new round of fighting to annihilate Hezbollah.

"Does Israel still want war to rehabilitate the defeated army and the tense Israeli public, or is it inclined toward peace after the loss of all peace opportunities over the past 15 years?

"Irrespective of what Israelis are thinking after the defeat of their army, and regardless of what the Americans want to do later -- either to turn the Resistance's victory into a defeat through local tools that volunteered to perform this mission or to exploit what happened to save the new Middle East from the crisis it finds itself in -- the Arab region is witnessing the birth pangs of a new Middle East different from the one that the neoconservatives planned. Those neoconservatives wanted the occupation of Iraq, the aggression on Lebanon, and the events in the occupied Palestinian territories to serve as connected links in their new Middle East. But the new Middle East that is being born now had its first blocks laid by the Resistance on the rubble of the American-Israeli new Middle East.

"This new equation in the region had not crossed the minds of the planners and theorists in Washington and Tel Aviv. The implementation of their plan turned things upside down. The chaos that now prevails on the Israeli political scene and the frustration and disappointment in Washington provide ample

proof...."

"Israel and the Talk of Peace"

Adnan Ali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/24): "Much of the controversy that has arisen in Israel following Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's decision to form a committee to consider the possibility of resuming negotiations with Syria indicates that Israel is still not ready for a return to political action as a new option to deal with pending issues in the region....

"In the aftermath of the Israeli failure in Lebanon, the Israeli press is reflecting a major controversy over the grave consequences for Israel itself of neglecting the political process. This is because Israel, with the encouragement of Washington, has blocked all avenues before the Arab people to attain their rights, leaving them nothing other than a choice between armed resistance or total submission to the will of Israel and the United States.

"Arabs have vehemently expressed their rejection of the option of capitulation, through resistance in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, making up for the official Arab weakness in confronting the US-Israeli arrogance.

"Despite the harsh lesson the Israeli government has received in Lebanon, it has, to date, failed to learn a sound lesson, and it may not do so at all. The current talk of peace in Israel is more likely intended to distract attention from the Israeli government's failure in Lebanon and, perhaps, to cover up another imminent aggression."

"We Wish He Hadn't Caused Destruction and Weren't Generous"

As'ad Abbud, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/24): "With unique generosity President Bush announced

an offer of \$230 million for the Lebanese reconstruction effort....

"Despite the sweetness of the victory, offering such gifts appears like sprinkling dirty sugar on virtuous wounds.... Bush could have accepted a ceasefire in the first week of the war. If he had, he would have spared Lebanon the loss of thousands of people and millions of dollars and have saved his valuable gift for himself. He could have stopped the shipment of weapons, particularly the stupid bombs -- stupid as their dispatcher. If he had, he would have spared Lebanon all those losses, have saved the price of his stupid bombs, and have spared Britain the fabricated embarrassment of allowing the shipment of those bombs via its territory....

"Bush's gift to Lebanon really deserves to be rejected. And I honestly say that it is shameful for every Arab to accept such a ridiculous and dirty gift.... All Arabs, including Syria, must contribute to the reconstruction of Lebanon...."

"A Dangerous Curve"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (8/24): "The United States is continuing its efforts to disarm Hezbollah and consequently turn Lebanon into a base for attacks against other countries in the region....

"US Ambassador John Bolton stated that Washington is working for a new Security Council resolution calling for disarming Hezbollah.... It is obvious that Resolution 1701 complements Resolution 1559, and that the new resolution that Bolton is talking about complements the conditions that the United States and Israel, in collusion with other countries, specifically at the United Nations, set for Lebanon to meet. This proves that the US Administration's only concern is to please Israel, even at the expense of American interests in the region.

"The US talk about Hezbollah's weapons is intimidation to destabilize Lebanon and facilitate the achievement of what the terrorist aggression was unable to achieve...."

"On Whom Do Arabs Rely at the Security Council?"

Salim Abbud, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/24): "The Arab regimes must wake up and confront the challenges that the entire Arab nation is facing....

"Arabs' silence on what is happening in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon, and on the threats against Syria, prevented the world from supporting Arabs or showing sympathy for them. It made the United States and other countries ignore and disdain Arab sentiments and bypass Arabs, to do whatever they want in the Arab region and to defend Israel and use their veto in its favor and their influence to support it. These Arab forces and regimes, which saw the action of the Resistance as an uncalculated adventure, possess many pressure and power cards, but they are not being used....

"Although the Israeli-American war is still going on in Lebanon, threatening the entire region, the official Arab order still adopts a cold position, relying on an American-French-British role even though all these countries play one role for one objective: supporting Israel with no limits and undermining the Lebanese, Palestinian, and Iraqi resistance to kill the spirit of resistance among the Arabs...."

Corbin